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## **Commission for Countering Extremism**

# **National Action: links between the far right, extremism and terrorism**

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\*Following publication the author has clarified a number of points in this paper, making clearer information on: what is contained in his portfolio; some of the arrests and convictions mentioned; and the official launch and subsequent proscription of Nation Action.

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## Introduction

In December 2016, *National Action* was proscribed under the Terrorism Act 2000. Deemed to be concerned in terrorism<sup>1</sup>, it was a landmark decision: the first time in British history a far-right group had been proscribed. Accordingly, it became a criminal offence to be a member of *National Action*, invite support or help organise any meetings connected with it. Likewise, to wear clothing, carry symbols or display articles which suggest support. Since its proscription, the police have announced 28 arrests on suspicion of membership – four relating to members of the British armed forces – resulting in 11 successful convictions for membership alongside other offences, specifically three convictions for possessing information likely useful to a person preparing to commit an act of terrorism, and one conviction apiece for inciting racial hatred, distributing a terrorist publication, preparing an act of terrorism and making threats to kill a police officer.<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing, further trials are pending. Members of National Action (pre- and post-proscription) have additionally been arrested and convicted of other offences, including inciting racial hatred, possession, making explosives and conspiracy to commit violent disorder. This paper offers a detailed examination of *National Action* exploring the links between the far-right, extremism and terrorism. In doing so, this paper generates new knowledge and understanding about the group’s commitment to ‘authentic’ nationalist ideologies, the relationship between those ideologies and violence, the trajectories taking the group and its activists from non-violence to violence, the impact of proscription and its potential legacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Home Office, *Proscribed Terrorist Organisations*, London: Home Office, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> The 10 men and one woman convicted of membership of National Action are: Mikko Vehvilainen, Alex Deakin, Christopher Lythgoe, Matthew Hankinson, Daniel Bogunovic, Adam Thomas, Claudia Patatas, Joel Wilmore, Darren Fletcher, Nathan Pryke and Daniel Ward.

## Methods

As Blee rightly notes, researching the far-right and other extremist groups is complex and problematic because many activists deem academics as untrustworthy and hostile<sup>3</sup>. *National Action* was also notoriously secretive. For this reason Goodwin notes that studies in the field necessarily employ externalist methodological approaches<sup>4</sup>, relying on materials and resources that exist in the public and political domains. For the purpose of this paper, an innovative four-stranded methodology was developed as a means of extending the research beyond basic externalist approaches. The first comprised a detailed review of the author’s extensive portfolio of *National Action* resources gathered both pre- and post-proscription that are no longer available in the public domain including previously unpublished information and text from the group’s website, newsletters and member communications (referred to from hereon in as ‘author’s portfolio’). Since proscription, the portfolio’s resources have been added to through engaging with specialist practitioners in the field of policing and counter-terrorism. The second included a detailed review of publicly available resources and materials including policy documents, political briefings and speeches, news reportage and non-specialist opened type commentaries. The third required a literature review of scholarly studies. Given the body of *National Action*-specific literature is small, the review drew more widely on scholarly studies relating to the far-right, extremism, terrorism and radicalisation where appropriate. The final strand drew on research notes based upon the author’s extensive engagement with those practitioners referred to in strand one; through the author’s

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<sup>3</sup> Blee, K. M. (2007). Ethnographies of the far right. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36(2), 119-128.

<sup>4</sup> Goodwin, Matthew J. 2006. The rise and faults of the internalist perspective in extreme right studies. *Representations* 42 (4): 347-64.

participation as ‘independent expert’ on various nationally and regionally focused advisory panels and committees. This has taken various forms: face-to-face via meetings, workshops, and both formal and informal conversations; electronically via email, online forums, and document sharing.

### **Far-Right Roots and Demarcating Difference**

The post-1999 ‘modernisation’ of the *British National Party* (BNP) saw a range of initiatives implemented including the establishment of the *Young British National Party* (YBNP) and better training for activists and organisers<sup>5</sup>. Nick Griffin, leader at the time, hoped that it would help halt the decline in traditional nationalism while reinvigorating activism among Britain’s youth. While Griffin encouraged the *YBNP* to take control of the party towards the end of his leadership<sup>6</sup>, some *YBNP* activists sought alternative spaces through which to express their political ideas. *Resistance* - established by former *YBNP* leader Kieran Trent and Matthew Tait - was one such space<sup>7</sup>. While it failed to meet aspirations, it did provide a space in which another former member of the *YBNP*, Alex Davies met Ben Raymond. They, like Trent, Tait and Griffin previously, believed the time was right for Britain’s youth to be receptive towards to nationalist political ideologies.

Raymond and Davies were convinced that for a nationalist youth movement to be a success, it would be necessary to de-stabilise those groups within the British far-right milieu who at the time were – in the eyes of the pair at least – damaging the heritage and

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<sup>5</sup> Goodwin, M. J. (2010) Activism in Contemporary Extreme Right Parties: The Case of the British National Party (BNP), *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 20:1, 31-54.

<sup>6</sup> Allen, C. (2017). Proscribing National Action: Considering the Impact of Banning the British Far-Right Group. *The Political Quarterly*, 88(4), 652-659.

<sup>7</sup> Allen, C. (2017). Proscribing National Action: Considering the Impact of Banning the British Far-Right Group. *PQ Blog*, <https://politicalquarterly.blog/2017/09/13/proscribing-national-action-considering/> (accessed 12 March 2019).

legacy of nationalism<sup>8</sup>. Initially, this took the form of Raymond and Davies compiling lists of those deemed ‘worthy’ and ‘unworthy’: the former included the *British Democratic Party*, *National Front*, *Blood & Honour* and Oswald Mosley; the latter, the *BNP* and newly formed *English Defence League* (EDL). For Raymond and Davies, the *EDL* epitomised all that was wrong with the contemporary British far-right; its support for the state of Israel and having supporters that routinely engaged in drunken and loutish behaviour – an anathema to the nationalist cause<sup>9</sup>. Having launched *National Action* in 2013<sup>10</sup>, the pair used the opportunity to simultaneously launch a manifesto from which they responded directly to this problem. Setting out a clear and unequivocal commitment to a ‘pure’ (traditional and thereby, authentic) interpretation of nationalism, *National Action’s* primary goals were to establish a white homeland in Britain and to express antagonism towards ‘unworthy’ nationalists<sup>11</sup>.

The latter was especially important because from the very outset, Raymond and Davies sought to categorically demarcate and differentiate *National Action* from the rest of the contemporary British far-right. In this respect, *National Action* can be understood to be ‘of’ the far-right rather than ‘in’ the far-right. To explain this, it is necessary to consider what is meant by ‘far-right’. According to the academic literature, ‘far-right’ is best understood as an umbrella term: one that encompasses a spectrum of ideologies, actions and behaviours that various political groups and social movements adhere to<sup>12</sup>. In this

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<sup>8</sup> Allen, C. (2017). Proscribing National Action: Considering the Impact of Banning the British Far-Right Group. *The Political Quarterly*, 88(4), 652-659.

<sup>9</sup> Hope Not Hate (nd) National Action (NA) is the product of the political and ideological demise of the British National Party (BNP), *Hope Not Hate*, <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/research/the-hate-files/national-action/> (accessed 12 September 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Jackson, P. (2014). # hitlerwasright: National Action and National Socialism for the 21st century. *Journal of Deradicalisation*, 1(1), 97-115.

<sup>11</sup> Allen, C. (2017). Proscribing National Action: Considering the Impact of Banning the British Far-Right Group. *The Political Quarterly*, 88(4), 652-659.

<sup>12</sup> Mudde, C. (1995) Right-wing extremism analysed. *European Journal of Political Research*, 27(2), 203-224.

respect, the far-right is far from homogenous and far from static. In recent years this can be seen in a number of ways with various groups moving from: electoralism to street-based protest; hierarchical organisations to loose-knit networks; face-to-face to online interaction and recruitment; targeting ‘race’ and Jewish communities to Muslims and immigration; and from fascistic and nationalistic worldviews to more populist and antagonistic alternatives<sup>13</sup>. Notably, some groups now advocate the ‘defence’ of certain liberal and civil values, including free speech and gender equality<sup>14</sup>. It was this understanding of the far-right *National Action* sought to demarcate itself from. This should not detract from the fact that *National Action* – as indeed Raymond and Davies – have a clear and unequivocal far-right lineage; one that preceded the period of ‘modernisation’ referred to previously. This lineage can be traced back to the *British Union of Fascists* through to the *White Defence League* and the *National Front*, being influenced by various other ‘worthy’ nationalists along the way. Demarcation was however, far from mere ideological rhetoric. Back in 2014 that demarcation manifested through violence when *National Action* activists confronted *EDL* supporters at a demonstration in Rotherham: evidence also of the group’s willingness to translate its words into action.

## **Traditional Ideology and Target Audiences**

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<sup>13</sup> Allen, C., Isakjee, A. &

<sup>14</sup> Allen, C. (2018) Defending Free Speech: A New Front for Resisting Islamification, *Europe Now* <https://www.europenowjournal.org/2018/10/01/defending-free-speech-a-new-front-for-resisting-islamification/> (accessed 1 June 2019).

On the *National Action* website it was claimed that there was “nothing clandestine about our operation or intentions...everything we do is public and publicised”<sup>15</sup>. It went on to describe itself as:

“Britain’s premier Nationalist street movement...National Action is a National Socialist youth organisation; our clientèle are clean, intelligent, and ambitious people typically in their late teens or twenties. It is a scene for young nationalists to network, engage socially, and be creative at a time when there is no prospect for a political success at the current time...National Action comes with a social mission aimed at improving the minds and bodies of the nationalist youth.”<sup>16</sup>

From early on, the notion of violence was a recurrent feature of the discourse of *National Action* albeit one split between outward- and the inward-facing audiences. The outward-facing was typically couched in the language of ‘self-defence’ and ‘self-protection’:

“In regards to violence, all violence has been of self-defence by patriots against mobs of state backed anarchists who are free to organise and attack all legal right wing demonstrations. If [we] were in the United States it would have been our full legal right to shoot them all dead”<sup>17</sup>

The inward-facing was far more explicit as evidenced by communication about combat training from Christopher Lythgoe, one of the group’s senior leaders:

"...National Action now operates what I like to call a No-Deadweight Policy. That means everyone trains in case we need it. We don't carry anyone. No exceptions...Imagine what it will be like when we have 20, 30, 50 or more guys

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<sup>15</sup> Author’s portfolio.

<sup>16</sup> Author’s portfolio.

<sup>17</sup> Author’s portfolio.

who can ALL punch unconscious an 18-stone adversary. AND we will fight as one disciplined body. That's what I would call formidable unit."<sup>18</sup>

Always ensuring its approach was ideologically consistent and true, the above was supported by a citation to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*:

"Physical culture must inoculate the individual with the conviction of his superiority and...in the consciousness of his own strength...it must give him those athletic skills which serve as a weapon for the defence of the movement"<sup>19</sup>

Citing and admiring Hitler and the Third Reich was a recurrent feature, routinely deployed to justify the group's ultra-nationalism, racism, antisemitism, disablism, homophobia, anti-liberalism and anti-capitalism<sup>20</sup>. This was especially true of the group's view about 'race'. Directly echoing the Third Reich, *National Action* claimed it was necessary to "...advocate the rights of our own people to reclaim their soil, purify their blood, and become strong again"<sup>21</sup>. Not only was this necessary in order to 'save' Britain – hence the need for a 'white homeland' – but so too would its appease many of those who were "...tired of seeing injustice; our people exploited and abused, our women raped and murdered, society crumble, our nation dying"<sup>22</sup>. Clearly combining elements of the Third Reich with those relating to Aryanism and white supremacy, the group's message was most overtly expressed in one of its leaflets: "Cleanse Britain of parasites. The white man is on the march – white power"<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Author's portfolio.

<sup>19</sup> Author's portfolio.

<sup>20</sup> Allen, C. (2017). Proscribing National Action: Considering the Impact of Banning the British Far-Right Group. *PQ Blog*, <https://politicalquarterly.blog/2017/09/13/proscribing-national-action-considering/> (accessed 12 March 2019).

<sup>21</sup> Author's portfolio.

<sup>22</sup> Author's portfolio.

<sup>23</sup> Simon Wright, Ben Glaze & Colin Cortbus, 'Rise of Hitler-loving National Action group who want to 'ethnically cleanse' the UK', *Daily Mirror*, 7 June 2014.



The influence and legacy of the Third Reich was evident in how *National Action* understood and interpreted all of the group's it did not like. As regards Jewish communities, it stated that “weakness on the Jewish question is simply unforgivable, ignorance is inexcusable”<sup>24</sup>. Once more demarcating itself from a far-right that had almost exclusively targeted Muslims over Jews for at least a decade and a half<sup>25</sup>. Davies reinforced *National Action's* commitment to National Socialism when he was quoted as saying “I don't want to say what I'd like to do to Jews – it's too extreme”<sup>26</sup>. National Socialist ideology also informed the group's view on homosexuality. This is best illustrated by a group banner which comprised a rainbow flag – a common LGBTQ symbol – over a cartoon of two men having anal sex. Two further images appeared either side of this: one of *Stonewall's* “Some People Are Gay, Get Over It”<sup>27</sup>; the other, a *National Action* poster stating, “No Tolerance: 100% Anti-Pederast Action”. The juxtaposition of pederasty with homosexuality evidencing the perniciousness of the message being conveyed. Similar too in relation to disability. *National Action* repeatedly expressed distaste for various mental and physical conditions, utilising an array of highly offensive terms and insults into its discourse including ‘retard’, ‘nature's rejects’ and ‘fucktard’ among others. Another was ‘subhuman’<sup>28</sup>: a term which is traceable to the Third Reich and which had quite despicable outcomes<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Lucy Sheriff, ‘Meet New Neo-Nazi Group National Action Which Just Wants To ‘Piss People Off’’, *HuffPost*, 6 March 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Allen, C. (2010) Fear and loathing: The political discourse in relation to Muslims and Islam in the British contemporary setting. *Politics and Religion Journal*, 4(2), 221-236.

<sup>26</sup> Allen, C. (2017). Proscribing National Action: Considering the Impact of Banning the British Far-Right Group. *PQ Blog*, <https://politicalquarterly.blog/2017/09/13/proscribing-national-action-considering/> (accessed 12 March 2019).

<sup>27</sup> For more information, see Stonewall <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/our-work/campaigns/get-over-it>.

<sup>28</sup> Author's portfolio.

<sup>29</sup> Hinton, A. (1998). Why did the Nazis kill?: Anthropology, genocide and the Goldhagen controversy. *Anthropology Today*, 14(5), 9-15.

## From Direct Action to Acts of Violence

Early on, *National Action* engaged in “demonstrations, publicity stunts, and other activities in order to grow and spread our message...of National Socialism”<sup>30</sup>. While the group’s earliest demonstrations looked similar to those of the *EDL* and *Britain First*, *National Action’s* distinctivity and demarcation from the far-right milieu was readily apparent in its banners, slogans and symbols. One in particular declared “Hitler was Right”<sup>31</sup>. The embeddedness of National Socialism and the Third Reich was also evident in the group’s logo which was extremely similar to the *Sturmabteilung*, Hitler’s paramilitary. Rarely exceeding 50 activists, the group adopted a uniform of all black streetwear for its public demonstrations. Directly appealing to a youth demographic, one image on its website juxtaposed a group of Nike-wearing activists alongside the Nike swoosh and *Just Do It* slogan<sup>32</sup>. Another distinctive feature was how National Action asked its supporters to refrain from drinking excessively and taking drugs. Demarcating it from the “sheepdom” of others within the far-right, from the outset the group sought to target an audience which were more likely to be committed to the nationalist cause<sup>33</sup>.

The group further demarcated itself from its peers with the adoption of direct action. One of earliest examples saw around 20 activists – numbers already declining – protest outside London’s South African embassy before marching to Westminster’s Parliament

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<sup>30</sup> Allen, C. (2017) National Action: what I discovered about the ideology of Britain’s violent neo-Nazi youth movement, *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/national-action-what-i-discovered-about-the-ideology-of-britains-violent-neo-nazi-youth-movement-83527> (accessed 24 February 2019).

<sup>31</sup> Macklin, G. (2019) The Evolution of Extreme-Right Terrorism and Efforts to Counter It in the United Kingdom. *CTC Sentinel*, January 2019, 12(1), pp.15-20.

<sup>32</sup> Author’s portfolio.

<sup>33</sup> Allen, C. (2017) National Action: what I discovered about the ideology of Britain’s violent neo-Nazi youth movement, *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/national-action-what-i-discovered-about-the-ideology-of-britains-violent-neo-nazi-youth-movement-83527> (accessed 24 February 2019).

Square to put bananas in the mouth and hands of Nelson Mandela’s statue<sup>34</sup>. Others included the organisation of ‘White Man’ marches in Liverpool<sup>35</sup> and Newcastle<sup>36</sup>, and taking selfies while performing ‘Seig Heil’ salutes in the Buchenwald concentration camp<sup>37</sup>. The group were acutely aware that this type of direct action afforded them free publicity in the media as stated on its website: “if you are seeing this website for the first time it is probably because you have read or seen our activities in the media”<sup>38</sup>. One activity that attracted widespread media coverage was its attempt to recreate the Third Reich’s soup kitchen. Dubbed ‘Soup Kitchens of Hate’, the group’s activists collaborated with British-based supporters of the *National Review of Poland* to distribute food and drink to white-only homeless people in Yorkshire and Glasgow<sup>39</sup>. Davies explained that this was also inspired by Greece’s Golden Dawn: “[its] charity work, activism and social work...brought them a respect, some credibility in the eyes of the Greek people...”<sup>40</sup>.

Such sentiments resonate with the observation made previously about how its founders believed *National Action* needed to advocate a social mission. While its approach to homelessness was deliberately discriminatory and fostered division and discontent, it was also designed – in line with the comments about *Golden Dawn* – to communicate to

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<sup>34</sup> Wright, S., Glaze, B. & Cortbus, C. (2014) Exposed: Rise of Hitler-loving National Action group who want to 'ethnically cleanse' the UK. *The Mirror*, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/exposed-rise-hitler-loving-national-action-3659759> (accessed 21 March 2019).

<sup>35</sup> Hopkins, S. (2015) Liverpool: White Man March Neo-Nazis Cower In Station Depot After Being Pelted With Rubbish, Then Cancel Event. *HuffPost*, [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/08/15/white-man-march-in-liverpool-canceled\\_n\\_7992084.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/08/15/white-man-march-in-liverpool-canceled_n_7992084.html) (accessed 18 March 2019).

<sup>36</sup> Bernhard, M. (2015) English Nazis Held a 'White Man March' in Newcastle. *Vice News*, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/9bzega/white-man-march-photos-193](https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/9bzega/white-man-march-photos-193) (accessed 18 March 2019).

<sup>37</sup> Hopkins, S. (2016) Nazi Salute At Buchenwald Death Camp Could Lead To National Action Members Being Jailed In Germany, *HuffPost*, [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/nazi-salute-at-buchenwald-death-camp-could-lead-to-national-action-members-being-jailed-in-germany\\_uk\\_5746ed3ce4b03e9b9ed566ec](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/nazi-salute-at-buchenwald-death-camp-could-lead-to-national-action-members-being-jailed-in-germany_uk_5746ed3ce4b03e9b9ed566ec) (accessed 16 March 2019).

<sup>38</sup> Author’s portfolio.

<sup>39</sup> Nsubuga, J. (2016) Neo-Nazi group sets up soup-kitchen that only feeds homeless white people. *Metro*, <https://metro.co.uk/2016/09/20/neo-nazi-group-sets-up-soup-kitchen-that-only-feeds-homeless-white-people-6139013/?ito=cbshare> (accessed 12 March 2019).

<sup>40</sup> James Poulter & Simon Childs, ‘Neo-Nazis are using a white-only homeless charity to spread race hate’, *Vice*, 15 September 2016 [http://www.vice.com/en\\_uk/read/neo-nazis-homeless-outreach-race-hate](http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/neo-nazis-homeless-outreach-race-hate)

and change the opinion of a wider, societal audience. While externalist approaches make it difficult to know exactly who the group were communicating with and in what ways, specialist practitioners suggest that the group were simultaneously targeting other, far more specific types of audiences also. These included those who had already established a keen interest in nationalism or National Socialism and those who were able to show commitment to the cause. As Gerry Gable the former editor of *Searchlight* magazine put it, *National Action* are “not looking to attract thickos who just want a fight. They want thinkers who are prepared to die for National Socialism”<sup>41</sup>. As well as targeting servicemen such as Lance Corporal Mikko Vehviläinen, a serving member of the British Army who was known to be recruiting other soldiers<sup>42</sup>, anecdotal evidence suggests that the group did similar with those who possessed IT skills<sup>43</sup>. Further demarcating itself from its far-right peers at the time, *National Action* preferred a small number of committed individuals over the sprawling number of demonstrators typical of the *EDL*.

While non-violent direct action raised the group’s profile, a far more pernicious trajectory towards violence was emerging. As early as 2014, outdoor training camps were being organised including one alleged to have been led by Russian MMA fighter Denis Nikitin<sup>44</sup>. A year later, the first violent incident linked to the group occurred when Zack Davies shouted “white power” while trying to behead a Sikh man. Explained as revenge for the murder of Lee Rigby, Davies stated that while he was a member of the group he had acted

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<sup>41</sup> Alexander, D. (2015) Hateful and here: German Anti-Islam extremists rally in Glasgow in bid to recruit Scots. *Daily Record*, <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/hateful-here-german-anti-islam-extremists-4998372> (accessed 24 March 2019).

<sup>42</sup> Sddique, H. (2018) British soldier recruited for far-right group while in army, *Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/nov/12/british-army-solider-recruited-far-right-group-national-action> (accessed 3 June 2019).

<sup>43</sup> Author’s portfolio.

<sup>44</sup> Author’s portfolio.

under his own volition<sup>45</sup>. Similar was evident on the day Thomas Mair killed the MP for Batley and Spen, Jo Cox. Initially, known activist Jack Coulson tweeted that Mair was “a hero, we need more people like him to butcher the race traitors”<sup>46</sup>. Soon after the group did similar, agreeing that Mair was a ‘hero’ while adding there were “Only 649 MPs to go #WhiteJihad”<sup>47</sup>. In response to Mair’s appearance in court during which he replied to being asked his name with “My name is Death to traitors, freedom for Britain”<sup>48</sup>, *National Action* adopted the phrase as a slogan which was emblazoned across its website<sup>49</sup>. Attracting significant condemnation, the group dismissed any suggestion it was glorifying or endorsing Mair. In its November 2016 newsletter it explained how the tweets were mere examples of the “...cutting edge humour regularly employed by members of our youth group...which may go over the heads of some people”<sup>50</sup>.

Soon after, the then Home Secretary Amber Rudd announced that *National Action* was being proscribed as it was ‘concerned in terrorism’:

“...a racist, antisemitic and homophobic organisation which stirs up hatred, glorifies violence and promotes a vile ideology. It has absolutely no place in a Britain that works for everyone...proscribing it will prevent its membership from

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<sup>45</sup> Anon (2015) Lee Rigby revenge attacker Zack Davies given life sentence. *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-north-east-wales-34218184> (accessed 18 March 2019).

<sup>46</sup> Black, M. (2017) Pipe bomb was start of Bradford teenager’s ‘all-out race war,’ court told. *Telegraph & Argus*, <https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/15028718.pipe-bomb-was-start-of-bradford-teenagers-all-out-race-war-court-told/> (accessed 21 March 2019).

<sup>47</sup> Macklin, G. (2019) The Evolution of Extreme-Right Terrorism and Efforts to Counter It in the United Kingdom. *CTC Sentinel*, January 2019, 12(1), pp.15-20.

<sup>48</sup> Lusher, A. (2016) Jo Cox death: Thomas Mair, accused of murdering MP, gives name to court as ‘death to traitors, freedom for Britain’. *Independent*, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/jo-cox-death-thomas-mair-tells-court-his-name-is-death-to-traitors-freedom-for-britain-a7088851.html> (accessed 20 March 2019).

<sup>49</sup> Author’s portfolio.

<sup>50</sup> Author’s portfolio.

growing, stop the spread of poisonous propaganda and protect vulnerable young people at risk of radicalisation from its toxic views”<sup>51</sup>.

The group refuted any claims of being an extremist organisation, claiming instead to be “radical not ‘extremist’”. Like *Al-Muhajiroun* before it<sup>52</sup>, a number of National Action activists began to regroup proposing different names as a means of navigating around proscription. This included *Scottish Dawn* and *National Socialist Anti-Capitalist Action* (NS131), both of which has been subsequently proscribed. Other groups or names suggested included *Triple KKK Mafia*,<sup>53</sup> and *System Resistance Network*<sup>54</sup> which emerged from an earlier group *Vanguard Britannia*<sup>55</sup> and *National Socialist Network*.<sup>56</sup>

Unlike *Al-Muhajiroun* however, there have been a relatively high number of arrests and successful convictions of *National Action* members in the relatively short period of time since the group was proscribed. This can be explained in a number of different ways. The first is that there has been a greater willingness to pursue *National Action* members and certainly this would seem likely according to specialist practitioners who shared their views with the author. The second is that the police and others learned lessons from the failures associated with the pursuance of members of *Al-Muhajiroun* and the subsequent

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<sup>51</sup> For the Government statement about proscribing National Action see, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-action-becomes-first-extreme-right-wing-group-to-be-banned-in-uk>

<sup>52</sup> Raymond, C. Z. (2010) *Al Muhajiroun and Islam4UK: the group behind the ban*. London: ICSR.

<sup>53</sup> Anon (2018) Trio guilty of membership of banned British neo-Nazi group, *Crime Prosecution Service* <https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/trio-guilty-membership-banned-british-neo-nazi-group> (accessed 26 July 2019).

<sup>54</sup> Hope Not Hate (2018) Changing Names, *Hope Not Hate* <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/research/state-of-hate-2018/violence/changing-names/> (accessed 25 July 2019).

<sup>55</sup> Dearden, L. (2017) Banned neo-Nazi terrorist groups still recruiting as aliases of National Action, *Independent* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/national-action-neo-nazis-banned-terrorist-groups-scottish-dawn-ns131-jews-gay-muslims-jo-cox-police-a7974836.html> (accessed 25 July 2019).

<sup>56</sup> Archibald, S. (2017) Raymond’s ‘National Socialist Network’ flag wavers, *Hope Not Hate* <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2017/03/13/raymonds-national-socialist-network-flag-wavers/> (Accessed 26 July 2019).

impact these have had. While this was not something that arose in any engagement with specialist practitioners, this does not constitute evidence to suggest that this was not the case. The third is that given the lack of pursuance *Al-Muhajiroun* members, those linked to *National Action* assumed similar and so were complacent, dismissing any likelihood of proscription being a priority<sup>57</sup>. Without engaging those convicted, this too is difficult to substantiate. Finally, it cannot be overlooked that at the time of proscription, *West Midlands Police* were already investigating a number of *National Action* activists, thereby prompting the question as to whether the successful prosecutions were the result of proscription occurring at the right time and *National Action* activists being in the right place. Being investigated for stickering the campuses of Aston and Birmingham City universities by community police teams at the time of proscription, proscription flagged the issue to counter-terror police who subsequently took over the ensuing investigations. This would benefit from further consideration, as would the need to better understand the similarities and differences between post-proscription *National Action* and *Al-Muhajiroun*.

From the ensuing investigations, it became evident that a number of the group’s activists had undergone a trajectory towards a willingness to use and enact violence. For example, activists are known to have collectively fantasised about killing Jews and turning Chinese and black people into biofuel<sup>58</sup>. As Vehviläinen put it: “How anybody can somehow regard niggers and wogs as human beings and worthy of life is beyond me. I could shoot their

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<sup>57</sup> Allen, C. (2018) Proscribing National Action: has it been effective? *OpenDemocracy*, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/proscribing-national-action-has-it-been-effective/> (accessed 26 March 2019).

<sup>58</sup> De Simone, D. (2018) National Action: The new parents and the neo-Nazi terror threat. BBC News, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-45919730> (accessed 21 August 2019).

children and feel nothing”<sup>59</sup>. Vehviläinen is also known to have purchased a house in the Welsh village of Llansilin to build a white stronghold<sup>60</sup>. Preparing for the ‘racial apocalypse’, he was stockpiling guns, knives and other weaponry. Adam Thomas and Claudia Patatas were found to be in possession of weapons<sup>61</sup>. Deakin was convicted of possessing bomb-making manuals and distributing a publication detailing the ‘ethnic cleansing’ process<sup>62</sup>. Lythgoe was convicted of being a member of National Action while the jury failed to reach verdict in the case of Jack Renshaw, another former *YBNP* activist, who had previously pleaded guilty of conspiring to murder the Labour MP Rosie Cooper and Victoria Henderson, a detective who was investigating him for sexual offences.<sup>63</sup> The trajectory to violence was real.

### **National Action’s Legacy**

On the basis of the author’s extensive engagement with specialist practitioners, the post-proscription convictions have caused some – potentially significant – damage to the group, its infrastructure and importantly, its ability to function. One concern expressed at the time of proscription was the potential for it to catalyse a backlash among Britain’s far-right. To date, there is little evidence of this. Some possible explanations exist. The first is because Britain’s far-right would appear to be increasingly moving away from the

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<sup>59</sup> Dearden, L. (2018) British Army Lance Corporal was recruiting soldiers for neo-Nazi terrorist group. *Independent*, 13 November 2018.

<sup>60</sup> Macklin, G. (2019) The Evolution of Extreme-Right Terrorism and Efforts to Counter It in the United Kingdom. *CTC Sentinel*, January 2019, 12(1), pp.15-20.

<sup>61</sup> Dearden, L. (2018) National Action: Neo-Nazi terrorist couple who named baby ‘Adolf’ jailed. *Independent*, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/national-action-neo-nazi-couple-adolf-hitler-baby-adam-thomas-claudia-patatas-jail-court-case-a8686691.html> (accessed 21 March 2019).

<sup>62</sup> De Simone, D. (2018) National Action: The new parents and the neo-Nazi terror threat. *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-45919730> (accessed 10 March 2019).

<sup>63</sup> Macklin, G. (2019) The Evolution of Extreme-Right Terrorism and Efforts to Counter It in the United Kingdom. *CTC Sentinel*, January 2019, 12(1), pp.15-20.



traditional ideologies preferred by *National Action* towards ever more populist and antagonistic variants<sup>64</sup>. The second is that far-right groups do not seem to be undergoing the same trajectories *National Action* did. Both of these are explained by the fact that *National Action* were not of the ‘far-right’, a distinction which the group repeatedly posited through its self-differentiation and self-demarkation. It was also evident in the group’s self-expressed antagonism towards the far-right milieu and the ideologies they upheld. On this basis, the group’s legacy among Britain’s far-right milieu is likely to be minimal. While so, it is possible that Raymond, Davies or both might re-emerge at some time in the future under a new guise, using a new vehicle through which to espouse National Socialism. Anecdotal evidence suggests that specialist practitioners feel this is likely<sup>65</sup>.

It is beyond the far-right – in the more extreme fringe – where *National Action* might have its greatest potential legacy. As Macklin notes, this can be seen in how activists were known to be fostering links with transnational militant networks in Germany, the Baltics, and Scandinavia and with paramilitary groups including the Ukraine’s *Azov Battalion*<sup>66</sup>. This is supported by the knowledge that *National Action* has already inspired America’s *Atomwaffen Division* for whom activists have already been linked with a number of murders<sup>67</sup>. It is interesting that this transnationally influenced and inspired group is now reciprocally influencing and inspiring British groups, the *Sonnenkrieg Division* being one

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<sup>64</sup> Allen, C. (2018) Defending Free Speech: a new front for resisting Islamification. *Europe Now*, <https://www.europenowjournal.org/2018/10/01/defending-free-speech-a-new-front-for-resisting-islamification/> (accessed 12 March 2019).

<sup>65</sup> Author’s portfolio.

<sup>66</sup> Macklin, G. (2019) The Evolution of Extreme-Right Terrorism and Efforts to Counter It in the United Kingdom. *CTC Sentinel*, January 2019, 12(1), pp.15-20.

<sup>67</sup> Myre, G. (2018) Deadly Connection: Neo-Nazi Group Linked to 3 Accused Killers, *NPR*, <https://www.npr.org/2018/03/06/590292705/5-killings-3-states-and-1-common-neo-nazi-link?t=1553521853127> (accessed 19 March 2019).

for whom two of its members were recently convicted of terror-related offences<sup>68</sup>. Similarly at the transnational level is the potential legacy among individuals sympathetic to extreme right wing ideologies, especially those who frequent *Reddit*, *4chan*, *8chan* and similar. Because individuals in these spaces are increasingly adopting ‘pick’n’mix’ approaches to constructing ideological worldviews, they are likely to draw on those like *National Action* and their traditional ideologies as indeed social media influencers. Journalists and celebrities among others<sup>69</sup>. At this juncture however, such suggestions can only ever be speculative.

Which returns us to the issue raised previously about the appropriateness and relevance of language, terminologies and what is meant by ‘far-right’. This is because at different times and in different contexts, *National Action* was referred to and described as nationalist, extreme right wing, radical right, neo-Nazi, fascist and terrorist; all used interchangeably, without nuance or specificity. This is a weakness. While *National Action’s* founders may have been introduced to activism via certain far-right groups and had a clear lineage to a historical far-right, they – like the group – not only repeatedly demarcated themselves from the contemporary far-right but so too undertook trajectories that afforded them distance from the ideologies, activities and behaviours that were most common among the contemporary British far-right. For this reason, this paper posits that while *National Action* were undoubtedly of the far-right in terms of lineage and tradition, both the group and its activists did not see it being in the far-right as regards the contemporary context and manifestation of its peers.

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<sup>68</sup> De Simone, D. (2019) Teenage neo-Nazi admits terror offences. *BBC News*, [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/amp/uk-48027056?\\_twitter\\_impression=true](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/amp/uk-48027056?_twitter_impression=true) (Accessed 15 May 2019).

<sup>69</sup> Allen, C. (2019) Extreme far right: ‘pick’n’mix’ ideologies and direct messaging online make for deadly new combination. *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/extreme-far-right-picknmix-ideologies-and-direct-messaging-online-make-for-deadly-new-combination-112331> (accessed 25 March 2019).

So too does it position the group as extreme or extremist, albeit not in the way currently defined by the British Government, as the “vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs”<sup>70</sup>. This definition of extremism offers little in the context of National Action. At its most straightforward, requiring respect and tolerance for different faiths and beliefs excludes the fact that National Action showed little respect or tolerance for different ‘races’, ethnicities, genders, sexual identities and more. This issue is accentuated further when one considers how few within the far-right milieu would likely – and openly – declare that they were against ‘democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty’. On the contrary, all would be likely to actively espouse a commitment to Britain and its values as a means of distancing themselves from a whole series of ‘Others’.

The weakness of the Government’s extremism definition was addressed by *National Action* immediately prior to its proscription. Stating on its website:

“Despite there being a bunch of legislation existing against it nobody seems to know what extremism actually ‘is’...An extremist is somebody who uses or encourages illegal violence or terrorism to achieve their goals”<sup>71</sup>

While it is clear that some members of the group were willing or had a propensity to use illegal violence or terrorism to achieve its ideological goals, its rebuttal raises two interesting points. First, and while a Governmental definition of extremism does exist, it offers little clarity not least because interpretations of extremism will invariably be subjective and contextual. The second is that the Government’s definition does not make

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<sup>70</sup> HM Government (2013) *Tackling extremism in the UK*. London: Cabinet Office,

<sup>71</sup> Author’s portfolio.

any specific reference to the willingness or propensity to deploy violence, thereby conflating both violent and non-violent forms and manifestations. Even if propensity and deployment is included within ‘active opposition’, then it remains unclear and indeed, continues to offer little. That there are different types of violence was something *National Action* was also acutely aware of. In the same statement, it added:

“National Action is radical – which means it is at the far end of the political spectrum but only advocate [sic] legal violence, ie through the Law. Our ultimate aim of a white Britain can only ever be achieved through state power and the complicity of state institutions; Police force, Army, Intelligence Services, etc”<sup>72</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Key to understanding *National Action* was an awareness of its ideology and its commitment to enacting it. While it would be easy to mock how this was manifested at times – the Miss Hitler beauty competition<sup>73</sup>, Adolf baby names<sup>74</sup> and swastika shaped cookie cutters<sup>75</sup> – doing so undermines the group and activists’ commitment to exact and enact that same ideology. Likewise, it underplays the very real and extremely pernicious views those same activists held and justified in readiness for translating them into action. In this way, white supremacy and Aryanism justified the need for a ‘race war’ while white genocide justified the need for a white homeland and blood purity. That the group

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<sup>72</sup> Author’s portfolio.

<sup>73</sup> Allen, C. (2017). Proscribing National Action: Considering the Impact of Banning the British Far-Right Group. *The Political Quarterly*, 88(4), 652-659.

<sup>74</sup> Dearden, L. (2018) National Action: Neo-Nazi terrorist couple who named baby ‘Adolf’ jailed. *Independent*, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/national-action-neo-nazi-couple-adolf-hitler-baby-adam-thomas-claudia-patatas-jail-court-case-a8686691.html> (accessed 21 March 2019).

<sup>75</sup> Anon (2018) National Action trial: Three guilty of neo-Nazi group membership. *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-46151838> (accessed 12 March 2019).

repeatedly used its ideological commitment to differentiate and demarcate itself from others is telling not least because it remained something of a constant throughout the group's evolution.

While the group's ideological commitment remained consistent, the propensity to and willingness to exact violence in order to enact its ideology did seem to intensify over time. This was apparent in two trajectories. The first was from a commitment to its ideology through to a commitment to enact its ideology. The second was from a position of non-violence through to a propensity to violence and a willingness and preparedness to enact the same. From its early acknowledgement of the need for violence as self-defence, what evolved was an ever more intense commitment to violence as a means of enacting its ideology. Here, violence can be understood as a means to an ideological end. While it is again easy to dismiss or underplay this, the reality was that activists had planned violence, were prepared to enact violence and for some, had indeed done so. Both trajectories – whether ideology or violence – were therefore necessarily concurrent and necessarily conducive also. While theories of radicalisation have been posited elsewhere, they do not necessarily lend themselves to research undertaken using externalist methodological approaches. For this reason, trajectories offer the most appropriate insight from the research undertaken.

What is clear is that *National Action* will go down in history as the first group of its kind to be proscribed. While the relatively high number of successful convictions are likely to have damaged the group, little damage will have been done to the ideology of National Socialism or those who feel or express a commitment to it. The same is true of those willing to use violence to enact that same ideology. In this respect, there can be no guarantees that those currently serving prison sentences will undergo a volte-face; be

that in terms of an ideological commitment or a willingness to use violence. Here again, it is possible that some time in the future those same individuals might re-emerge in ways that seek to reaffirm or revitalise their ideological commitment. For this reason, the ideologies of the extreme right wing and those committed to them are likely to continue to pose a very real threat to our domestic security for at least the foreseeable future irrespective of how damaged *National Action* may or may not be.